

The office door opened and the Vulcan male stepped inside. His attention was briefly drawn to the large floor to ceiling windows to his left that overlooked the magnificent view of the Golden Gate Bridge and Marin Headlands, where the Federation Council Chambers were located, before stepping over to the large desk across the room, behind which a very dark-skinned human man sat.

“The investigation team’s final report, Admiral,” the Vulcan said, handing one of the new padd devices to the man behind the desk. “As I discussed with you last week, we all agreed the ship should be listed as ‘Lost, presumed destroyed.’ I have already ordered letters of condolence be transmitted to the family members of each of the crew.”

“Thank you, Commander,” the Fleet Admiral said in his deep bass voice. “I know this was a difficult assignment for you personally.”

“I handled the assignment in a logical manner without emotional attachment,” the Vulcan stated. “It was the least I could do for my departed shipmates.” The Vulcan now leaned over to point at various places displayed on the screen. “Now, if I could just get you to place your signature here... here... and here.”

The admiral touched the indicated locations with a stylus that was stored on the side of the padd, then handed the device back to the Vulcan.

“Tell me, Commander, do you believe there is any hope at all that the ship somehow survived its mission?” Fleet Admiral Cartwright asked, the whites of his eyes contrasting sharply with the color of his skin as he looked up at his visitor.

“Logically, no,” replied Commander Solak. “All evidence points to the *Arcturus* having been destroyed in the time-travel attempt. However, nothing concerning Commodore Eric Johnson would surprise me.”

Space, the Final Frontier...

Star Trek: Personal Logs

“In Search of... the *USS Arcturus*” By PJK

With some material adapted from “...Where Change is the Only Constant” By John Colagioia

Six Months Earlier

Stardate 9200.6

Earth Year 2288

The Tikopai-class starship *USS Arcturus NCC-1807* orbited high over San Francisco. Numerous shuttles entered and exited the starship’s open hanger bay at the aft end of the secondary engineering hull, transferring equipment, technicians, and personnel on and off the starship, while travel pods docked and undocked at the various ports around the hull.

In his quarters, the starship’s recently appointed chief of operations, Commander Solak, packed a change of uniform into a duffle bag before slipping his maroon uniform jacket on and attaching the breast flap to the fabric strip where his rank insignia was displayed. He then departed the quarters, leaving the duffle on his bunk where he would return for it before departing the *Arcturus* in a few hours.

On his way to the bridge he passed several other crew members that were either permanently or - like himself - temporarily transferring off the starship before the upcoming special mission. The *Arcturus* had been assigned to use the slingshot time warp method to travel back to Earth’s late-1960’s in an attempt to determine the origin and true purpose of the being known as Gary Seven, and since not all of the normally assigned crew members were required for such a potentially dangerous mission, Starfleet had approved the transfer of several dozen members of the crew. Among them was Lieutenant Cala, a cat-like telepath and one of the *Arcturus*’ senior helm and navigation officers, who was transferring to the command staff of a brand new starship. Also crowding the corridors as they moved their belongings and weapons off-ship were the members of the *Arcturus*’ embarked company of Starfleet Marines. The mood among the Marines was one of gloom, after the loss of one of their men, corpsman Corporal Logan Whitehorse, just a few months earlier followed by the more recent death of their company commander, Major Copeland, during battle against renegade Orion pirates in the Beta Rigel system less only a month ago, and those that remained looked forward to transferring off the starship and on to a new assignment.

Solak finally reached the bridge, nodding to the starship’s current acting-first officer, Rear Admiral Bryan Ackermann, who was sitting in the off-center seat just to the left of and slightly behind the traditional command chair at the center of the bridge,

reviewing status reports, before he walked over to the science console, where a white-haired Efrosian man with a personality as cold as his homeworld and a blue-skinned female Andorian stood over a bald-headed young Deltan sitting at the controls.

“How are the simulations of the time warp formula working?” Solak asked as he approached Commander Bael V’ahhst-Ohrne’Dagon, Lieutenant (JG) Idrisu, and visiting computer specialist T’Kor.

“We’re having some problems,” said T’Kor, the Andorian computer engineer temporarily assigned to the *Arcturus* specifically for this mission. “All previous attempts at time warp have the ship in question approaching the sun at close to warp 9. Even the captured Klingon Bird-of-Prey exceeded its design parameters when then-Admiral Kirk and his crew used it to return to the past two years ago.”

“I’m positive we can alter the parameters to take into account our ship’s maximum safe warp speed,” Idrisu said. “We’ve run the simulation a dozen times, and each time the results are well within expected limitation.”

“I am still not entirely comfortable with this course of action,” Bael remarked, his icy blue eyes looking piercingly at Solak. “I think the risk is too great in comparison to the expected reward. After all, why do we really need to know if Gary Seven was telling Captain Kirk the truth twenty years ago? The man has been dead for almost three hundred years. If he were not what he said he was, what difference does it make now?”

“First, how can you be sure Gary Seven is dead?” Solak asked. “Yes, he claimed he was descended from humans taken from Earth thousands of years ago, but who is to say he was not genetically modified to extend his life span by decades? Perhaps even centuries? This is one of the mysteries this mission is intended to find the answers to. Logic suggests we obtain as many answers as we can at whatever opportunity arises, and Starfleet currently has the opportunity to send a starship back to the same approximate time period as when the *Enterprise* first encountered Mister Seven.”

“It makes as much sense as going back in time to find out where Amelia Earhart disappeared to. What difference does it make to us now? I think we are risking changing history for no true purpose,” Bael remarked before turning his attention back to the console. “Run the simulation again, Lieutenant. And this time set the speed parameter at warp 7.5.”

As Idrisu started the simulation program again, Solak heard the port side turbolift doors open and the unmistakable sound of the starship’s commanding officer step out. The Commodore had spent the better part of the last 24 hours in his ready room, which was located where other starships had a bridge level docking port, and was connected to the bridge via the turbolift, reviewing the mission orders and reports from the various department heads as to the status of the modifications the crew was rigging to assure the *Arcturus* survived its journey through time.

“Status?” Commodore Eric W. Johnson asked, stepping around the back of the bridge toward where the four officers were gathered.

“Commander Timinar reported that modifications to the engines were completed about an hour ago, Eric,” Ackermann reported.

“Good. I would hate to ruin our warp drive heading back to the past and not be able to return.” Johnson then stopped near the science console and said, “I thought you were going ashore for this mission, Mister Solak?”

“Commander Bael and I are reviewing the final computer simulations to verify the time warp program parameters,” the Vulcan replied. “I will be monitoring your mission from the command center in San Francisco. From my point of view, your entire mission should take no more than three hours from the time you depart orbit.”

“And yet, if everything goes as planned,” said Johnson, “we’re going to be in the 20th century for two whole weeks. I think most of the command staff is going to need a break by then. Make sure the rec facilities at Starfleet Command will be open late tomorrow night.”

“I will be standing by to assume the watch as duty officer upon your return to orbit,” Solak said. “And I will endeavor to, as you say, keep the rec facilities open for you. I believe my tasks aboard the ship are done. Request permission to disembark, Commodore?”

“Permission granted, Commander. See you in two weeks.”

“Or tomorrow evening, depending on your point of view,” Solak noted with one raised eyebrow.

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The next morning, at 0800 hours sharp, Solak walked into the command center of Starfleet Command. At one end of the room, a large picture window overlooked the Golden Gate Bridge. The other end was dominated by three large viewscreens, beneath which a row of several manned consoles were located. In the center was the primary interface console affectionately called the Pool Table by the officers who worked there. It was in this very room only two years prior that the Federation President personally monitored the crisis and transmitted his now-famous planetary distress call when a probe of unknown origin and purpose approached Earth in an attempt to establish contact with the species *Megaptera novaeangliae*, more commonly known as the humpback whale.

The Vulcan approached the Commander-Starfleet, who was standing at the pool table, giving orders to an Arkenite communications officer sitting there.

“Greetings, Admiral Cartwright,” Solak said. “I am Commander Solak, from the *USS Arcturus*. I am here to aid in monitoring the *Arcturus*’ mission.”

“Good morning, Commander,” Cartwright said in his deep bass voice. “You will be my special assistant for this mission, relaying my orders to the *Arcturus* while monitoring and keeping me apprised of their status. As a member of the *Arcturus*’ crew, you may notice some subtle change that the regular staff here might miss.”

“I understand, Admiral. If someone can show me where I will be performing my duties?”

Cartwright had one of the lieutenants stationed in the room direct Solak to the correct console where he would be working. Located directly beneath the main viewscreen on the right, which currently displayed tactical diagrams of the immediate vicinity of Earth with various starships in orbit and a broader display of the outer solar system with both incoming and departing traffic, Solak noted the *Arcturus*, currently high over the east coast of North America, was designated in yellow on the upper screen, indicating it was scheduled to soon depart orbit. The Vulcan pulled out his chair and sat down at the console, placing a communication’s earpiece in his right ear and establishing contact with the *Arcturus*.

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On the bridge of the starship *Arcturus*, communications specialist Penji Fil turned in his seat to face the commanding officer.

“Commodore,” the Catullan said. “Starfleet Command is standing by. Solek offers his morning greeting.”

“Very well,” Johnson said with a grin toward Ackermann. “Send Mister Solak my regards, Mister Fil. Mister DuLac, plot a course out to the orbit of Mars.”

“Aye, my Lord,” the Avalonian navigator replied in his heavy accent.

“Mister Kale, prepare to break orbit.”

“Standing by on thrusters and impulse power,” the Centauri man at the helm responded.

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Back in Starfleet Command, Solak announced, “Admiral, the *Arcturus* is ready to depart orbit.”

“Commander; to the *Arcturus*: Permission to depart orbit is granted. Good luck.”

Solak passed the fleet admiral’s order on to the *Arcturus*. In spite of himself, he felt a stirring of emotion in the pit of his stomach, a longing to be aboard his ship and taking part in this special mission, but quickly regained control. A moment later his console telemetry display changed, and the Vulcan again directed his next report to Admiral Cartwright. “The *Arcturus* has broken orbit and is setting course toward the asteroid belt, Admiral.”

“Very good,” Cartwright replied in his bass voice. “Keep me apprised of any unexpected changes.”

* * * *

“On course toward the asteroid belt,” Kale reported. “ETA to turnaround point, thirty two minutes.”

“Very well, Helmsman,” Johnson said before starting to climb out of the command chair and looking in the direction of the man in the off-center seat. “Bryan, take the conn. I still need to review the final mission orders for once we reach the 20th century. Call me in my ready room once we reach the turn-around coordinates.”

“Will do, Eric,” Ackermann said, moving over into the center seat and ordering, “Steady as she goes.”

“Steady as she goes, aye,” Kale responded. “Maintaining full impulse power.”

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Almost half an hour later, a human woman with short, curly blonde hair stepped over to Solak’s console, carrying an electronic log book, and paused by the Vulcan.

“Commander Solak? Commander Janice Rand, Communications Division. What is the current status of the *Arcturus*?”

“The *Arcturus* is nearing the asteroid belt and is expected to reach the turn-around point within the next few minutes,” Solak responded. “Since they are currently close to Mars, subspace communications and telemetry are currently being routed through the new shipyard array at Utopia Planitia.”

“Any problems communicating with your ship?” Rand asked.

“Negative. Intra-system communication is relatively simple compared to long-range communications beyond the solar system. There have not been...” Solak suddenly stopped talking, quickly raising his hand to the earpiece. He seemed to concentrate for a moment before looking toward the center of the room and announcing, “Admiral, the *Arcturus* has reached the turn-around point and is altering course toward the sun. They announce the time warp program is being loaded into the navigation computer and the ship should be ready to enter warp speed at your command.”

“Very good, Commander,” the Fleet Admiral responded. “Inform Commodore Johnson he has permission to proceed at his own discretion.”

“Aye, Admiral,” Solak replied.

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“The maximum safe speed in this ship, according to the manuals, is about warp 7.3,” said T’Kor. “So, to keep things on the safe side, we’ll base the equation on warp 7.1. So that makes the angle of approach...” The Andorian entered figures into the computation.

“Perfect! We finally have the equation set,” Idrisu said with a smile. “Re-input the new course. Let’s get this mission underway.” The Deltan looked over at the human man in the center seat. “Admiral, we have the new course ready and verified. Whenever you’re ready, we can start.”

Ackermann touched a control on the arm of the command chair, activating the intercom channel to the ready room. “Eric, the ship is ready,” he said.

“On my way,” replied Johnson’s voice. Moments later the turbolift door opened and Johnson stepped out, moving directly to the center seat as Ackermann resumed his place in the off-center seat.

“Mister DuLac,” Johnson commanded. “Lay in the course toward Sol. Mister Kale, warp 6!”

“Course plotted, Lord,” young Galen DuLac reported.

“Engaging warp drive,” Kale added. “Ahead warp 6.”

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“*Arcturus* reports they are entering warp,” Solak announced. The command center was suddenly filled with tension. It was a very rare event when Starfleet authorized a starship to enter warp while within the solar system, rarer still to authorize a vessel to intentionally warp back through time, and had only been accomplished fewer times than could be counted on the fingers of an average human hand since first intentionally performed by the *Enterprise* in late 2268. Every sensor in the solar system capable of tracking the *Arcturus* was monitoring the ship as it entered warp toward the sun. At the same time, a data stream of telemetry appeared on Solak’s console monitor, displaying all the starship’s vital statistics.

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As the crew prepared for the time displacement, the klaxon of the red alert sounded throughout the ship.

“Ready to accelerate to warp 7.1, sir,” helmsman Kalin Kale stated.

“Engage!” Johnson ordered with a smile.

“Warp six-point-two... Point-four... Point-six... Point-eight...,” reported Kale with cool efficiency. All eyes on the *Arcturus*’ bridge remained glued on the viewscreen and the bright, yellow sun at its center. “Six-point-nine... Warp seven...” The *Arcturus* started to vibrate within the gravitational stresses. “Warp seven-point-one...!”

* * * *

“*Arcturus* has passed within the orbit of Venus,” Solak reported. “All systems still nominal. Ship is on track to enter time warp in...”

A momentary glitch in the telemetry being received from the *Arcturus* attracted Solak’s attention. He studied the readouts for a moment, but the glitch did not return.

“Status, Commander?” Cartwright asked, looking toward the Vulcan with piercing eyes when he suddenly stopped talking.

“*Arcturus* currently at warp 7.1 and holding. On track to enter time warp in ten seconds... Nine... Eight...”

The glitch suddenly reappeared for a millisecond, and Solak’s eyebrows knit in puzzlement.

“*Arcturus* course curving around the arc of the sun. Telemetry readings are now being relayed by satellites orbiting Venus on the far side of Sol,” the Arkenite Lt Commander sitting at the pool table announced.

Solak continued to stare at his monitor screen, trying to confirm what he thought he saw, but the telemetry continued to appear as expected. *'Perhaps it was caused by the switch from Earth and Luna-based sensors to remote sensors around Venus?'* Solak thought to himself.

"Indications are the *Arcturus* has entered time warp," the Arkenite announced. At that precise moment, all telemetry on Solek's console ceased. It was as if the starship had never existed. On the viewscreen, the green indicator that represented the *Arcturus* flashed in the last confirmed position of the starship on the far side of the sun, just within the orbit of Mercury. Solak reviewed the last several seconds of data, confirming the starship's entry into time warp. It looked like the program had worked as planned, with the exception that the ship was slightly off predicted track by several meters without explanation. Solak then turned his chair to face Cartwright as he said, "If the mission goes as planned, the *Arcturus* should reappear in the vicinity of the orbit of Venus on the side of the sun closest to Earth no sooner than one hour. However, due to unanticipated variables, it could be as long as six hours."

"Start the clock," Cartwright ordered, and a countdown clock appeared along the bottom of the first main viewscreen on the left counting down from sixty minutes, while a second clock appeared on the bottom of the viewscreen directly above Solak, currently displaying 5 hours, 59 minutes, 27 seconds.

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The first hour passed routinely, most of the staff on duty performing their normal jobs. Admiral Cartwright occasionally stepped over to the window overlooking the Golden Gate to admire the view and pass the time before walking around the room, verifying readings on various consoles. At one point, the admiral received a visit by the Federation President, who jokingly asked if the timeline had been changed in any manner. The Commander-Starfleet jokingly replied, "Who are you? Wasn't the President a Tellerite when I woke up this morning!"

Then, as the second hour passed, followed by the third, a detectable tension started filling the room. Solak started reviewing the telemetry his console had recorded in detail, to see if there was any indication of a problem aboard the *Arcturus* prior to its disappearance into the time warp that might explain the delay, but he could find nothing aside from the three momentary glitches he noticed as the ship entered the time warp, and could not explain them in any meaningful manner.

Finally, at the four hour point, he walked over to the Arkenite officer at the pool table and requested access to some of the other telemetry data that was recorded from other sensor sources so that he could compare the data. The Arkenite authorized Solek's access to the databank in question. Solak then returned to his console and started analyzing everything he had access to in regards to the *Arcturus* mission. Almost right away he noted variations in the starship's magnetic flux at the moments the glitch had appeared on his console, but he still had no idea what it meant.

"It's almost as if the warp field of a second starship was present," the Vulcan said to himself. "But that is impossible."

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At mission time T-plus eight hours, Fleet Admiral Cartwright re-entered the command center. He had spent the last hour in a meeting with the Chief of Starfleet Operations, and both admirals had come to the agreement that something had gone wrong and the status of the *Arcturus* needed to be updated.

"Attention all hands," Cartwright announced in his booming voice. "As of this moment, I am declaring the *USS Arcturus NCC-1807* officially overdue. Mister Solak..."

"Aye, Admiral," Solak said, standing up from his console for the first time in hours.

"I would like you in charge of an investigation team. Your goal is to determine what happened to the *Arcturus*, what the likelihood of her returning might be, and when we might expect her return."

"I am unsure if I can determine everything you ask with the data I have on hand, but I will endeavor to try my best, Admiral."

"I ask no less," Cartwright remarked. "Meet your team in Briefing Room 4 in ten minutes."

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After meeting his new team and making basic introductions, the investigators immediately got to work. Besides Solak, who directly represented the *Arcturus* crew along with being familiar with the theory behind the slingshot time-warp procedure and the specifics of the *Arcturus* and her systems, the team consisted of Dr. Vladimir Hershaf, an historian; Professor Marcus Ripepi, a warp field theoretician and engineer; Therin, an Andorian computer programming specialist and T'Kor's mentor; Etoli, a Deltan navigation and subspace theory expert, and Sloan Gregory, a representative from the Federation Department of Temporal Investigations. The first thing the team did was investigate the historical record, touching on almost all eras from Earth year 1900 to the 2280's with an

emphasis on the late-1960's and early-1970's, to determine if there was any evidence the *Arcturus* survived its journey back in time and performed its primary mission or left any evidence - no matter how small - that they had been present, which would have allowed the team to concentrate on the return trip as the probable point of failure.

"I've studied all relevant documents, Commander," Dr. Hershaft reported late the next morning. "I can find no indication the *Arcturus* ever reached its target date nor any other point in time plus or minus seventy five years from that date. Records we have access to indicate the only interaction Mister Gary Seven and Miss Roberta Lincoln had with Starfleet personnel from the future involved the crew of the *USS Enterprise NCC-1701*. Based on the information I have available, I have to conclude the *Arcturus* never made it back in time to begin with."

The other members of the team quickly agreed with the assessment after reviewing the synopsis Hershaft had prepared. "Very well," Solak said. "If the *Arcturus* did not travel back in time as expected, what other possibilities are left?"

"The obvious answer is there was some previously undetected problem in the warp drive and the ship exploded as it entered the time warp," suggested Ripepi.

"That is a possibility," Solak replied. "Though one I would rather not contemplate unless there is no other possible answer. Any other theories?"

"Could Mister Seven or his benefactors, aware of an attempt to locate and study him, have done something to the ship and caused it to be lost?" Dr. Hershaft asked.

"A viable theory," said Solak, "but how do we either prove or disprove it? I would rather we focus our attention on technical issues we can cite verifiable proof for."

"A miscalculation in the slingshot formula could have caused the starship to become lost in time forever?" offered Etoli.

"Not a fate I would wish to contemplate, particularly for my shipmates," Solak remarked with subdued distaste. "And if my understanding of the slingshot theory is correct, the ship would merely need to cut warp power and they would drop out of the time warp. Even simply losing engine power due to a break-down or malfunction would end the journey through time, and we would likely have found evidence of them somewhere in the historical record, albeit hidden, requesting assistance."

"Is it possible they warped so far back in time that we're just not looking back far enough?" suggested Gregory. "Perhaps thousands or hundreds of thousands of years in the past? So far back that we could never hope to find any evidence of their presence?"

"I would think if that had occurred, they would simply have returned to their time of origin immediately," said Therin.

"Not if something happened to their warp drive and they were unable to repair it that far in the past," Gregory said.

"Again, I'm sure Commodore Johnson and his crew would have found some method of letting us know, perhaps through cave paintings or rock carvings if nothing else, and request our assistance," Solak said.

"I suggest there was a miscalculation in the time warp formula, and that is responsible for the ship's loss," said Ripepi.

"I beg your pardon?" Therin said, looking at his fellow team member, his antennae twitching. "With all due respect to your expertise, I helped Specialist T'Kor, Commander Bael, and Lieutenant Idrisu develop and refine the formula they used for this mission over the last several weeks. I can assure you there was no miscalculation. All variables were taken into account."

There was an uncomfortable silence in the briefing room for several seconds until another member of the team spoke up.

"Perhaps we're overlooking the most obvious answer?" Solak remarked.

"And that would be...?" Ripepi asked.

"That somehow their time warp went wrong and the ship warped forward in time to some point in the future?"

"Unlikely," Etoli said before Therin could even respond. "The time warp is created by the starship's angle of approach to a high-gravity body in the space/time continuum coupled with its speed and angle of breakaway from the gravity source. The formula and angle the *Arcturus* used would only have sent the ship into the past. It would have taken a huge amount of power to drag the starship onto a different course and induce a warp toward the future. That kind of power would need to be generated by a starship larger and more powerful than the *Arcturus*. And Starfleet has only one ship large enough to do that; the *USS Excelsior*, and I know for a fact she's in spacedock undergoing a refit of her warp systems to remove the failed transwarp drive and replace it with standard warp drive."

"Perhaps the theory is not so farfetched," Solak remarked, surprising the team. He tapped several commands into the computer interface on the control panel in front of his seat, and the tri-viewer in the center of the table started displaying the telemetry Solak had been monitoring as the *Arcturus* neared the sun. As the data suddenly reached the first glitch the Vulcan had noticed, Solak paused the playback.

"This is a recording of the telemetry I received from the *Arcturus* in the moments before it entered the time warp," he explained. "Notice, if you will, the gravimetric flux readings in the warp field right at this point."

"It almost resembles two intersecting warp fields. What caused it?" the warp field specialist asked, studying the display with interest.

“I cannot currently answer that, but I would like to know if it could have had any effect on the *Arcturus*? Perhaps somehow be responsible for the starship’s disappearance?”

“I don’t see how,” Etoli remarked, still looking at the data display. “Its cause could be as simple as the momentary stresses created by a small solar flare against the warp field. It would not surprise me if we were to study the data on the sun at the time of the approach and time warp that we would learn there were numerous small flares caused by the warp field bending the fabric of space/time during the transit close to the sun’s photosphere.”

“Could you look further into this, just to be sure?” Solak asked Etoli.

“I believe it’s a dead end, but I will further research it,” the specialist replied.

“I still think something could have caused the ship to move forward in time instead of back,” Solak said. “Course telemetry just prior to the time warp indicates the *Arcturus* was moving off of projected course track. If that deviation continued – and perhaps increased – after the ship entered the time warp, it could have thrown the ship forward rather than back as planned.”

“If such a thing were to occur, I’m sure the ship would simply have returned to its point of origin as soon as they determined they were in the wrong time period,” Gregory remarked.

“Logically, there are several possible explanations for why the *Arcturus* would not simply have warped back to the present if they accidentally moved forward in time,” Solak suggested. “If the crew encountered anyone from the future and were informed they were considered lost in 2288, they may have chosen to remain for fear of changing future history.”

“And another possibility?” Therin asked.

“That they were prevented from returning, either by some future authority similar to our present Office of Temporal Investigations or the equivalent of Starfleet,” Solak said as he looked directly at Gregory.

“Prevented?” Hershafft asked.

“He means the crew was either detained or the entire ship destroyed,” Gregory remarked, returning the Vulcan’s stare.

“I would prefer not to contemplate either possibility,” Solak said. “Let’s analyze the data we have and see if we can make any definitive recommendation to Admiral Cartwright.”

* * * *

After studying all the available data over the course of two weeks, the team came to a conclusion and started compiling a preliminary report. In spite of Therin’s steadfast assertion that the time warp formula he helped develop in conjunction with Baael, Idrisu, and T’Kor could only have sent the *Arcturus* back in time to their expected target date of 1968, Solak agreed to present the team’s preliminary theoretical finding, that there was a possibility the starship was instead warped forward in time a short period, but if so, probability was it would be no more than six weeks into the future.

“So you think the *Arcturus* will reappear within the next month?” the Commander-Starfleet asked as he looked at the investigation team’s preliminary report.

“That is our working theory, Admiral,” Solak said as the rest of the team nodded ascent behind him. “Professor Ripepi believes, according to the data we have on hand, that something massive, and at this point we’re unsure what it was beyond an unpredicted solar flare, altered the *Arcturus*’ course just as it entered time warp. There is some evidence in the ship’s course track just prior to loss of telemetry that supports this theory. If this is the case, I’m sure once Commodore Johnson realized what was happening he would have ordered the warp ceased immediately. Based on computer simulations and our own experiment in the Enterprise-class bridge simulator at the Academy, the ship would have come out of warp within thirty seconds or less after breaking the time barrier – from the crew’s perspective – emerging back in real space no later than stardate 9217.9.”

“And what if you’re wrong?” Cartwright asked, looking up at the Vulcan. “What if the *Arcturus* does not re-emerge?”

“Then, unless another explanation presents itself, it means there is a 96.072% chance the *Arcturus* was destroyed or irretrievably lost in the attempt.”

Cartwright silently contemplated the possibilities. After nearly a minute, he interlaced his fingers on his desk and said, “Fine. We’ll give the *Arcturus* four more weeks to reappear. After all, if I were to miscalculate and warp to only forty or so days into the future, it would not seem to me worth the risk to warp back to my date of origin.”

“In the meantime, I will continue to study the data. We just received data recordings from two of the satellites orbiting Venus, the closest sensor platforms to the point where the *Arcturus* entered its time warp. Perhaps there is some detail in those recordings that can help us solve this mystery?” Solak suggested.

“Keep me apprised, Commander,” Cartwright ordered.

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Technically still assigned to the *Arcturus*, Solak had no official duty to which to report. Instead, he spent his days in the command center of Starfleet Command, studying the telemetry data in further detail. Every indication he looked at, including from the satellites orbiting Venus, showed the time warp should have gone as planned, the only real anomalies being the strange warp field reading and the unexplained course change. The ship's speed was correct. The entry angle was within the margin of error.

The investigation team had researched the solar data compiled during the mission, confirming Etoli's hypothesis that the starship's close approach to the surface of the sun incited several solar flares, including one that temporarily disrupted a subspace communications relay in Lunar orbit, but Solak still had a hard time accepting such an energy discharge from the sun could be responsible for throwing a starship traveling at warp so far off course that it would have altered the direction in time the vessel traveled. Instead, the more he studied the warp field readings, the more it looked to Solak like a second starship equal in mass to the *Arcturus* was present in the last few critical seconds prior to the entry into time warp, but no vessels of any kind registered on any sensors within the inner solar system for the twenty four hour period prior to and during the mission.

Eventually the date of the *Arcturus*' predicted return came and passed without any sign of the starship, and Solak continued working later and later into the evening each day in the command center. It was there one night three months after the *Arcturus*' disappearance, at nearly 2100 hours, that Admiral Cartwright found the Vulcan.

"Burning the midnight oil, Commander?" the fleet admiral asked as he stepped over to the console Solak was using.

"I'm still trying to determine the origin of this strange gravimetric reading, Admiral," the Vulcan said without looking at Cartwright. "Were I able to believe a Klingon or Romulan warship could reach Earth completely undetected, I would surmise a cloaked ship were present as the *Arcturus* entered time warp. However, aside from the fact no enemy vessel could have reached the Sol System, what purpose would it serve? How would the *Arcturus*' disappearance benefit either the Klingons or Romulans?"

"None that I am aware of," the dark-skinned admiral agreed as he leaned down to look at the data Solak was studying so closely. "Is that a reading of mass?" he finally asked.

"Yes, Admiral."

"It appears almost equal in mass to the *Arcturus* itself. Have you considered the possibility what you've been studying is a reflection of the starship of some kind?"

Solak finally turned his seat to face the admiral, a look of confusion - which admittedly looked odd on the face of a Vulcan - clouding his features. "A reflection?"

"This is all just theoretical, since I haven't spent the time studying this data to the same degree that you have, Commander, but could the reading have been caused by time dilation? The *Arcturus* literally being two places at once - so to speak - as it entered the time warp?"

"I do not see how that would be possible," Solak said, sounding unsure as he turned back to the console and looked again at the telemetry data. "No such time dilation has ever been observed in previous attempts to use the slingshot method to travel through time."

"But it could be possible?" Cartwright asked.

"There is still much Federation science does not understand regarding time travel theory," Solak remarked, the closest he would get to admitting the possibility the admiral might be correct.

Cartwright stood watching Solak for several more seconds. Finally, with an indecipherable expression, he said, "Carry on, Commander. Let me know if you reach any breakthrough."

"Aye, Admiral," Solak replied, again without turning away from the monitor screen.

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Stardate 9404.8

Six Months After the Arcturus' Disappearance

Solak sat on a chair in the reception room of the office of the Commander-Starfleet. He appeared calm, but inside he was roiling with his usually well subdued emotions. After nearly six months of studying the issue, the investigation team had come to a final conclusion, and he was here to present that conclusion to Admiral Cartwright in person, in spite of the doubts that were gnawing at him. Both Therin and Gregory were convinced the *Arcturus* had been destroyed instantly upon entering the warp. The others, including Solak, were not so sure but could offer no other viable hypothesis without proof. And with no other data to analyze, the team drafted and approved their final report to the Commander-Starfleet which Solak, as investigation team leader, was now presenting to Cartwright. Still, in spite of all the evidence they had, Solak still was not completely sure of their conclusions. Illogically, he still felt there was some other explanation for what had happened, an explanation that would allow for the survival of the starship and its crew. That Commodore Johnson would find some inexplicable way to survive. And if that were the case, Solak would be prepared. It would only mean getting the Fleet Admiral to authorize a couple of new directives without knowing he had done so.

A signal on the desk of the admiral's flag aide sounded and the Terran female commander sitting there looked over at her visitor.

“Admiral Cartwright will see you now, Commander,” she said, touching a control that opened the inner office door.

Solak nodded toward the flag aide and stood up, moving through the elaborately carved wooden doors. His attention was briefly drawn to the large floor to ceiling windows to his left that overlooked the magnificent view of the Golden Gate Bridge and Marin Headlands, where the Federation Council Chambers were located, before stepping over to the large desk across the room, behind which the very dark-skinned human man sat.

“The investigation team’s final report, Admiral,” the Vulcan said, handing one of the new padd devices to Admiral Cartwright. “As I discussed with you last week, we all agreed the ship should be listed as ‘Lost, presumed destroyed.’ I have already ordered letters of condolence be transmitted to the family members of each of the crew.”

“Thank you, Commander,” Cartwright said in his deep bass voice. “I know this was a difficult assignment for you personally.”

“I handled the assignment in a logical manner without emotional attachment,” the Vulcan stated, knowing he was only lying to himself but willing to live with it. “It was the least I could do for my departed shipmates.” The Vulcan leaned over to point at various places displayed on the screen, hoping Cartwright would not look too closely at the information displayed there. “Now, if I could just get you to place your signature here... here... and here.”

The first signature line confirmed Cartwright’s acceptance of the investigation’s conclusion, that the *USS Arcturus NCC-1807* was likely destroyed during its attempt to break the time barrier during a mission to study the past, killing the entire crew. The second and third signature lines authorized the inclusion of two new standing orders in Starfleet’s rules and regulations, to go into effect immediately and remain in place indefinitely. Inside, Solak hoped that perhaps his Vulcan lifespan would allow him to see those standing orders eventually repealed, though he held little real hope.

The admiral touched the indicated locations with a stylus that was stored on the side of the padd, then handed the device back to the Vulcan without looking at it too closely.

“Tell me, Commander, do you believe there is any hope at all that the ship somehow survived its mission?” Cartwright asked, the whites of his eyes contrasting sharply with the color of his skin as he looked up at his visitor.

“Logically, no,” replied Commander Solak. “All evidence points to the *Arcturus* having been destroyed in the time-travel attempt. However, nothing concerning Commodore Eric Johnson would surprise me.”

Cartwright smiled a grim looking smile as he nodded his head slowly. He then said, “Thank you for your perseverance in this matter, Commander. With the investigation now concluded, you will of course be granted a new assignment.” The fleet admiral activated the computer monitor on his desk and turned it to face Solak. It listed a dozen starship names and several starbase facilities located throughout the Federation. “I understand the *Springfield* is looking for a new first officer. Would you consider that assignment?”

Deep within, Solak was resistant. To accept transfer to a new command acknowledged the fact he would never return to the *Arcturus*, and it felt like an abandonment of his shipmates, Commodore Johnson in particular. Yet he could find no logical reason not to accept the offer. Even taking into consideration the two standing orders he just surreptitiously had the Commander-Starfleet sign, he knew the odds of the *Arcturus* ever returning were too infinitesimal to be worth even calculating.

“I accept your offer, Admiral. Thank you,” Solak said. Cartwright seemed surprised.

“I thought you would be more resistant to the idea of transferring,” the human man said, almost as he had been able to read Solak’s thoughts. “I guess this means there really is no chance of the *Arcturus* returning to us ever again?”

“Resuming my Starfleet career is the logical thing to do, Admiral,” Solak said. “There is no purpose in sitting in the command center studying and re-studying telemetry data that has already revealed all the information we will acquire from it.”

“I see your point,” Cartwright agreed. “Consider yourself on leave for the next seven days. I will have my aide make all the arrangements to transport you to your new assignment by the end of that week. I understand the *Springfield* is currently working with the natives of Beta Zeta V. They are a telepathic species. It should be an interesting assignment.”

“I look forward to it, Admiral,” Solak replied. He then offered his farewell and departed the admiral’s office, taking the padd with him. Instead of heading directly to his quarters to prepare for his imminent transfer, he returned to the command center one last time, downloading the two new standing orders into the fleet main databank for distribution to all Starfleet vessels and facilities. The first new order assured the name ‘*Arcturus*’ would never be assigned to another Starfleet vessel. The second assigned a Federation starship to patrol the region of the Sol System in the vicinity of the orbit of Venus continuously until further notice. Each vessel assigned would remain on station for six months before being relieved by the next vessel on a rotating basis, never leaving that region of the solar system unmonitored. In spite of all the evidence to the contrary, and the illogic of his feelings, Solak still held a slight glimmer of hope within him.

To Be Continued...

...in 2367...